

# Neighborhood Watch Newsletter



Volume 17 Issue 3

May – June 2009

## When a Criminal's Cover Is Your Identity

*Information Courtesy of FDIC*

**ID theft puts an ugly face on your good name. A con artist who knows your Social Security number, bank account information or other personal details *can temporarily become you* in order to commit fraud. Fixing the damage could take years. Here's how to reduce your risk.**

Your good name and reputation are among your most valuable assets. Unfortunately, criminals know the value of a good name and reputation, too. That's why increasing numbers of con artists are "stealing" identities. These robbers typically start by using theft or deception to learn a person's Social Security number, date of birth or other personal information. Armed with those details, the perpetrators can open credit card accounts, make purchases, take out loans, or make counterfeit checks and ATM cards in *your* name. In effect, the crook *becomes you* in order to commit fraud or theft.

Federal and state laws plus banking industry practices may limit your losses from ID theft. For example, under the Truth in Lending Act, if a crook opened a credit card account in your name and ran up thousands of dollars in charges, the most you'd owe is \$50—and many creditors will agree to excuse you of all liability. Still, innocent victims are likely to face long hours (and sometimes years) closing tarnished accounts and opening new ones, fixing credit records, and otherwise cleaning up the damage. They also may find themselves being denied loans, jobs and other opportunities because an identity theft ruined their reputation and credit rating.

### **A Checklist for Prevention**

Here are a few things you can do to minimize your risk of becoming a victim of ID theft:

#### **1. Protect your Social Security number, credit card numbers, account passwords and other personal information.**

Never divulge this kind of information unless you initiate the contact with a person or company you know and trust. A con artist can use these details and a few more, such as your mother's maiden name, to withdraw money from your bank account or order new credit cards or new checks in your name.

#### **2. Minimize the damage in case your wallet gets lost or stolen.**

Don't carry around more checks, credit cards or other bank items than you really expect to need. Limit the number of credit cards you carry by canceling the ones you don't use. Don't carry your Social Security number in your wallet or have it pre-printed on your checks. Pick passwords and "PINs" (Personal Identification Numbers) that will be tough for someone else to figure out—don't use your birth date or home address, for example. Don't keep this information on or near your checkbook, ATM card or debit

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### ***Westminster Police Department***

8200 Westminster Blvd.  
Westminster, CA 92683  
**Emergencies Call 911**

Business Line:  
714-898-3315

Dispatch Ext: 326  
Traffic Division Ext. 339  
Records Bureau Ext. 371

Business Hours:  
Sunday- Saturday  
7:00a.m. – 7:00p.m.

Website:  
[www.westminster-ca.gov/depts/police](http://www.westminster-ca.gov/depts/police)

card. Also, don't leave your wallet unattended in a store, restaurant, office or other public place—even for a few minutes.

### 3. Protect your incoming and outgoing mail.

Those envelopes may contain checks, credit card applications and any number of other items that can be very valuable to a fraud artist. How can you keep mail out of the wrong hands? Among the simplest solutions: Promptly remove mail from your mailbox after it has been delivered. If you're going to be away on vacation or some other travel, have your mail held at your local post office or ask someone you know and trust to collect your mail. Deposit outgoing mail, especially something containing personal financial information or checks, in the Postal Service's blue collection boxes, hand it to a mail carrier or take it to a local post office instead of leaving it in your doorway or home mailbox.

### 4. Practice home security.

Safely store extra checks and credit cards, documents that list your Social Security number, and similar valuable items. Be extra careful if you have housemates or if you let workers into your home. Don't advertise to burglars that you're away from home. Put lights on timers, temporarily stop delivery of your newspaper, and ask a neighbor to pick up any items that may arrive unexpectedly at your home. 🚗



## Hardening the Target

Recently, there has been a rise in vehicle burglaries in Westminster. The most common loss in vehicle burglaries includes portable GPS units, iPods/MP3 players, laptop computers, and purses. The majority of these items are left out in the open either on the dashboard or on the front or rear floor boards. This makes a vehicle burglar's job much easier. By leaving these items in plain view and so easily accessible, burglars do not have to actually enter the vehicle. The window can be broken and the burglar can reach into the vehicle, to take the property. To lessen your chances of becoming the victim of a vehicle burglary, before exiting your vehicle, remove all valuables. This simple step will drastically reduce the chance of your vehicle being burglarized.

### Vehicle Burglary Prevention Tips

The Westminster Police Department would like to give you a few vehicle burglary prevention tips.

There are many things vehicle owners and residents can do to protect themselves, their neighbors and their property. By taking actions to prevent vehicle burglaries and reporting suspicious activity, residents can reduce vehicle burglaries in their neighborhoods and public parking lots.

- Always lock your doors even if you are making a quick stop at the gas station, convenience store or mini mall.
- Do not leave any personal property lying on the seats of the vehicle.
- Always put personal property away (out of sight), prior to arrival at your destination; place the property under a seat or inside the trunk.
- If you have a pull out stereo, take it with you. If you have a detachable faceplate stereo, take the faceplate with you.
- Do not leave money in your ashtray.
- Keep your garage door remote out of plain view, and if stolen, change the remote control frequency.
- Don't leave a vehicle in unattended parking lots for an extended period.
- Never attach a tag with your name and address to your key ring. If the keys are lost or stolen, the tag will lead a thief directly to your car and your home. If you have to leave your vehicle with a parking attendant, leave only the ignition key.
- At night, park in well-lit areas with lots of people around.
- Consider an alarm system.
- Report to police any person(s) in your neighborhood who appear suspicious or out of place. If possible get a description of the subjects.
- Don't hesitate to call the police if you are suspicious of someone or something. Time is of the essence.

If you would like to report a suspicious person or vehicle, call Westminster Police at (714) 898-3315 or in case of emergency, call 911. 🚗

Members of the community often take the time to let us know how the Police Department is doing. We appreciate your letters, emails, and phone calls. Hearing from you is the best way for us to ensure that we are serving your needs. As always, we strive to provide the best public safety services to each and every one in Westminster. Feel free to submit your feedback to: [Jbelton@Westminster-CA.gov](mailto:Jbelton@Westminster-CA.gov).

## Vacation Checklist



One of the crimes most frequently reported to the police is residential burglary. It's also the most preventable. It does not take much or cost much to outsmart most burglars. They are not professionals, but rather people taking advantage of an easy target. Burglars look for homes that give the appearance that the homeowner is away for an extended period of time, such as a vacation. The following crime prevention tips are designed to allow vacationers to return to a secure residence.

- Discontinue any deliveries to the home by phone or in person ahead of time. Do not leave notes.
- Either discontinue mail or newspaper delivery or have a neighbor or friend pick them up daily.
- Inform neighbors of your absence so they can be extra alert for suspicious activities or person(s). Leave a key with them so the house can be inspected. Tell them where you will be and how to contact you in the event of an emergency while you are gone. Possibly ask them to vary the positions of the shades and blinds in the house.
- Never leave your house key hidden outside under a doormat, in a flower pot or on the ledge of the door.
- If you have a motor vehicle that is not garaged, arrange for it to be moved from time to time while you are gone.
- Arrange for someone to mow your lawn, rake leaves and maintain the yard to give the home a lived in look.
- Do not publicize vacation plans before hand. Burglars can read the newspaper, also.
- Have a neighbor place garbage cans at the curb on your normal pickup day(s) and return them after the garbage pickup is made.
- Plug in timers to turn lights and a radio or television on and off at appropriate times.
- Turn the bell or ringer on your telephone down low. If a burglar is around, he won't be alerted to an absence by a ringing telephone.
- Leave your trip plans and an emergency phone number with trusted neighbors or friends.
- Lock your valuables in a safe deposit box or fire safe. Document all valuables and include serial numbers if possible.
- Notify the Police Department and request extra patrol checks. Let police know which vehicles belong at your residence.

***Vacation is a time for fun and relaxation. Don't let your vacation be ruined by crime.*** 🐞

## **City of Westminster Department Directory**

Animal Control:  
714-898-3315 Ext. 365

**Chamber of Commerce:**  
**714-898-9648**

City Hall:  
714-898-3311

**Code Enforcement:**  
**714-893-3311**

Consumer Affairs:  
714-952-5210

Fair Housing Department:  
714-569-0823

**Family Resource Center:**  
**714-903-1331**

**Graffiti Hotline:**  
**714-895-2876**

Health Department:  
714-677-3600

West Justice Center:  
714-896-7111

**Recruitment:**  
**714-898-3315 Ext. 395**

Westminster Senior Center:  
714-895-2878

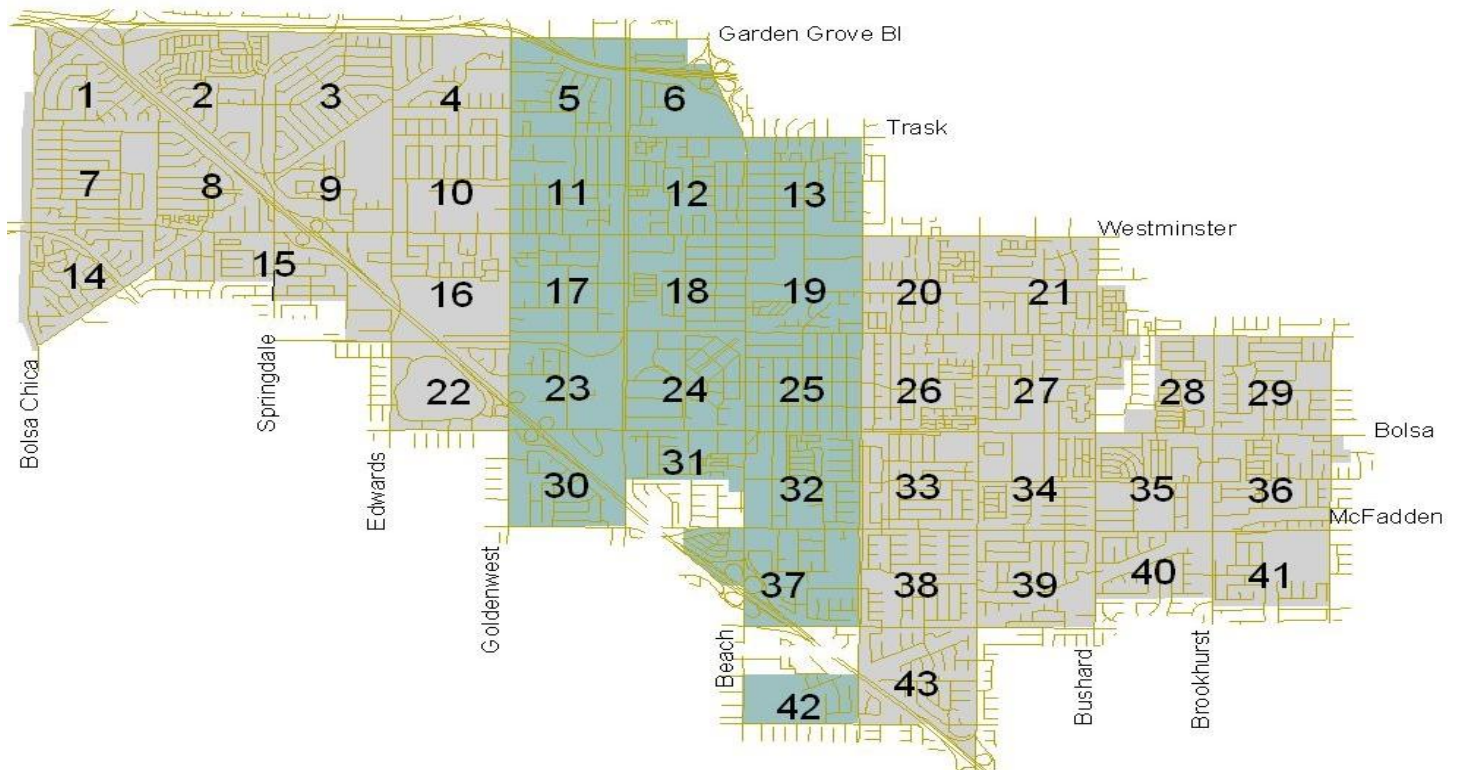
Vector Control:  
714-971-2421



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<http://www.westminster-ca.gov/depts/police/community>

# NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH NEWSLETTER



## RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES

| A<br>R<br>E<br>A | MAR | APRIL | YTD | LAST<br>YEAR | A<br>R<br>E<br>A | MAR | APRIL | YTD | LAST<br>YEAR | A<br>R<br>E<br>A | MAR | APRIL | YTD | LAST<br>YEAR |
|------------------|-----|-------|-----|--------------|------------------|-----|-------|-----|--------------|------------------|-----|-------|-----|--------------|
| 1                | 0   | 0     | 1   | 2            | 16               | 1   | 0     | 1   | 2            | 31               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 1            |
| 2                | 1   | 0     | 1   | 4            | 17               | 0   | 1     | 1   | 1            | 32               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 0            |
| 3                | 2   | 1     | 3   | 4            | 18               | 0   | 0     | 1   | 0            | 33               | 1   | 0     | 3   | 4            |
| 4                | 0   | 1     | 3   | 2            | 19               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 3            | 34               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 3            |
| 5                | 0   | 0     | 0   | 3            | 20               | 1   | 0     | 2   | 8            | 35               | 3   | 0     | 3   | 5            |
| 6                | 0   | 0     | 0   | 4            | 21               | 0   | 3     | 3   | 13           | 36               | 2   | 0     | 2   | 6            |
| 7                | 1   | 0     | 2   | 4            | 22               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 0            | 37               | 0   | 0     | 1   | 1            |
| 8                | 0   | 1     | 2   | 1            | 23               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 0            | 38               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 1            |
| 9                | 1   | 0     | 1   | 4            | 24               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 0            | 39               | 1   | 1     | 3   | 0            |
| 10               | 0   | 1     | 3   | 3            | 25               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 0            | 40               | 0   | 0     | 1   | 1            |
| 11               | 1   | 0     | 2   | 4            | 26               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 3            | 41               | 0   | 0     | 1   | 1            |
| 12               | 0   | 2     | 2   | 2            | 27               | 0   | 1     | 1   | 6            | 42               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 0            |
| 13               | 1   | 1     | 2   | 1            | 28               | 0   | 2     | 2   | 5            | 43               | 0   | 1     | 1   | 2            |
| 14               | 1   | 0     | 3   | 4            | 29               | 1   | 0     | 1   | 3            |                  |     |       |     |              |
| 15               | 0   | 0     | 0   | 6            | 30               | 0   | 2     | 2   | 1            |                  |     |       |     |              |

|                             | MAR | APRIL | YTD |
|-----------------------------|-----|-------|-----|
| <b>TOTAL<br/>BURGLARIES</b> | 18  | 18    | 54  |

**This newsletter is published bimonthly. It is compiled and edited by Ja'Nelle Belton, WPD Police Services Officer- Community Relations.**